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Provisional

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Organizational session for 2004

Provisional summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 21 January 2004, at 10 a.m.

Temporary President: Mr. Rosenthal ..... (Guatemala)
President: Ms. Rasi ..... (Finland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Temporary President** declared open the organizational session for 2004 of the Economic and Social Council.

Statement by the Temporary President

2. **The Temporary President** said that the ceremony of transmission of the Presidency offered the outgoing President of the Council the opportunity to assess the Council's work during his term and the incoming President the chance to outline his or her plans for the next term. It was also an opportunity to welcome the newly elected members of the Council and, at the same time, a symbol of continuity, thanks to the tradition of allowing one of the outgoing Vice-Presidents to assume the Presidency in the succeeding year. He was turning over the Presidency more convinced than ever that the Economic and Social Council had a unique role to play within the United Nations in furthering development, international cooperation, respect for human rights and humanitarian assistance.

3. At the same time, he was convinced that the Council was not realizing its full potential in that regard. He hoped that now that various initiatives for change were in the air — the revitalization of the General Assembly promoted by its President and the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change appointed by the Secretary-General in October 2003 — progress would also be made towards strengthening the Economic and Social Council. He was encouraged by the reaction to his memorandum of 10 September 2003 addressed to Council members, which had contained a number of proposals to that end. The only regret he had about his Presidency was that the heavy agenda of the Second Committee before the holiday break had not allowed time for an adequate discussion of those proposals. He hoped that such a discussion would take place in the weeks ahead.

4. A more ample, focused and rigorous fleshing out of each of the Council's generic functions, as spelled out in Articles 62 to 64 of the Charter of the United Nations, would be the key to the Council realizing its potential. Those functions included analytical, normative, advocacy, coordinating and oversight activities.

5. The Council was a unique forum for exploring emerging development issues and making them understandable not only for policy makers but also for the man in the street, thereby heightening public awareness. Because its mandate, composition and work ethic made the Council the global forum best suited for serious policy debate, the selection of relevant themes to be considered at the high-level segment was arguably one of its single most important undertakings. Unfortunately, it was not always approached in that spirit. He appealed to members to view the high-level segment not as a routine annual event but rather as a singular opportunity to make a vital contribution to the policy debate on development and international cooperation.

6. The Council's role of promoting coherence, coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system and even within the Secretariat must be taken more seriously. The integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits were vital to that end. He stressed the importance of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B and Council resolution 2003/6, which had enhanced the Council's capacity to use the conference follow-up as a framework for planning, monitoring and assessing United Nations activities. The annual spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization, and, as of 2005, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) constituted another tool for achieving greater coherence, coordination and cooperation. Beyond its recognized role as the follow-up mechanism for the International Conference on Financing for Development, the spring meeting afforded an opportunity for closer interaction and understanding at the intergovernmental and management levels. Lastly, greater interaction with the five United Nations regional commissions and integration of their views into global issues was a seriously underutilized tool for enhancing coherence, coordination and cooperation. The Council currently devoted less than a full working day to that very important activity.

7. The Council was in a position to enhance its general advocacy role for development and international cooperation. It was already having an impact with its Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on African countries emerging from conflict, namely, Guinea-Bissau and Burundi. On three separate occasions

during the last quarter of 2003, he had represented the Council at meetings of the Security Council on those countries, and the two organs had worked together in a cooperative spirit. Only the week before, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi had taken the Council's advocacy message to a donors' meeting in Brussels.

8. The Council was the main forum for integrating humanitarian activities on the ground with the development prospects of populations affected by natural or man-made disasters. The previous summer, it had adopted resolution E/2003/5, which underlined the need to consider the transition from relief to development in an integrated manner. The General Assembly had subsequently adopted resolution 58/25 on the same topic. As he had indicated in his memorandum of 10 September 2003, the Council did not do justice to its vital role of oversight and management of its diverse subsidiary bodies in various parts of the globe, including the functional commissions, and was not sufficiently informed about the activities of those bodies. He urged greater interaction with the subsidiary bodies, in particular the Commission on Human Rights, which, in turn had its own subsidiary bodies, some of which had their own subsidiary bodies (which meant that, in effect, they were subsidiary bodies of the Council three times removed).

9. Lastly, he called for greater streamlining of the authority of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes over operational activities. It was also highly desirable to strengthen the operational arm of the United Nations so that the Organization's policy orientations could be complemented by specific technical support in the field.

10. He reiterated the proposal on working methods contained in his memorandum of 10 September, namely, that the Council's general segment should be held separately from its other segments. The high-level segment or the humanitarian assistance segment might also be separated, since there was no compelling reason to attempt to cram all the Council's substantive activities into a single four-week session. That point had been reinforced by the General Assembly when it had adopted resolution 58/126, in which it had decided to examine whether it made sense to deal with all its substantive activities in a single 13-week session.

11. In reforming the Council, consideration should also be given to its composition (some members felt it had too many members while others felt that it did not have enough); its functions (for example, some delegations felt that the General Assembly, rather than the Council, should be responsible for electing the members of the Council's subsidiary bodies); the location of the Council's meetings (whether they should be held in Geneva biennially); and the reform of some of the Council's subsidiary bodies, particularly the Commission on Human Rights and the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. He was confident that those issues and many other reform matters would be addressed during the 2004 substantive session.

12. Finally, he thanked the members of the Bureau, the Secretariat and his own Mission for their hard work and support.

Election of the President

13. **The Temporary President** said that, under rule 18 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council, in 2004 it was the turn of the Group of Western and Other States to occupy the post of President. Consequently, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council wished to elect Ms. Marjatta Rasi to the office of President.

14. *Ms. Rasi (Finland) was elected President by acclamation.*

15. *Ms. Rasi took the Chair.*

Statement by the President

16. **The President** said that the Council had achieved a great deal in 2003. Its high-level segment had given rural development a central role on the international agenda. Its spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization had contributed to the follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey in March 2002, to the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, held by the General Assembly in New York in October 2003. It had shown its support for peace-building in Africa by establishing Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Guinea-Bissau and Burundi.

17. In 2004, the Council should focus on improving conference follow-up by seizing the opportunities provided by major United Nations conferences and

summits to fulfil the commitments assumed in the Millennium Declaration. The Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey Consensus), the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation) and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 (Brussels Programme of Action) had given the Council new responsibilities for monitoring progress. It must do more than coordinate and support the work of the United Nations; its work must have an impact on the ground.

18. The General Assembly, in resolution 57/270 B regarding integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields, had specifically requested the Council to draw up a multi-year work programme for the coordination segment of its substantive session, based on a focused and balanced list of cross-sectoral thematic issues common to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, including the objectives, goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration. She asked the members of the Council to take an active part in developing such a programme. A multi-year work programme would help the Council to engage the entities of the United Nations system in its work more effectively.

19. Turning to the 2004 substantive session of the Council, she said that the high-level segment would concentrate on mobilizing resources for, and encouraging implementation of, the Brussels Programme of Action. The Council would act as a common forum for all parts of the United Nations system to take part in that effort, and would provide a link between policy and practice.

20. The coordination segment would have two themes: mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, and promoting rural development in developing countries, using a coordinated and integrated United Nations approach. The Council must ensure that it allocated sufficient time to deal with those matters.

21. The operational activities segment would prepare the ground for the General Assembly's triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and provide an opportunity to discuss the way in which the United Nations Development Assistance Framework worked, a matter that was vital to the reform of the Organization. The closely related humanitarian affairs segment would provide guidance to strengthen the coordination of the Organization's emergency humanitarian assistance.

22. The general segment would be an important focus for her Presidency. The Council should make it as efficient as possible, and should pay attention to the work of the functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies, not only during that segment, but as part of its regular work throughout the year.

23. The 2004 spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization would include representatives of the Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The support of all the relevant United Nations agencies was crucial in order to follow up the implementation of all the various components of the Monterrey Consensus. During the preparatory process for the spring meeting, the Council would share information and best practices with the private sector and civil society. She hoped that the meeting itself would promote coherence, coordination and cooperation.

24. In 2004, the Council would continue to pay attention to African countries emerging from conflict through its Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Guinea-Bissau and Burundi. At its organizational session, it would consider a progress report from the former Group, and a report and recommendations from the latter. At its substantive session, it would examine the lessons learned from the initial experience of both Ad Hoc Groups.

25. By becoming more involved in post-conflict assistance, the Council was strengthening its working relationship with the Security Council and operational agencies of the United Nations and encouraging a comprehensive approach to peace and development in which the whole United Nations system could be engaged. The challenges of conflict and development were closely intertwined; there was therefore a need for a different approach both internationally and in the affected countries themselves.

26. The Council had taken a number of decisions to reform its working methods, accompanying the new momentum for reform in the Organization. The President of the General Assembly had taken an active

role in revitalizing that body and the Secretary-General had appointed a High-Level Panel On Threats, Challenges and Change. The Council should contribute to the work of that Panel and to the reform effort in general. The Bureau would consider how to improve the preparations for its meetings, and the members of the Council should consider how to focus on the various segments of the substantive session more closely. She undertook to listen to the members of the Council, to ensure that the Bureau worked in a transparent and responsive manner and to work to make the Council more relevant in the light of its role under the Charter of the United Nations.

Election of the Bureau

27. **The President** said that rule 18 of the rules of procedure specified that the Council should elect four Vice-Presidents. If there were no objections, she would take it that the Council wished to elect the candidates nominated by each regional group.

28. *Mr. Penjo (Bhutan), Mr. Koonjul (Mauritius), Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan) and Mr. Neil (Jamaica) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Council for 2004 by acclamation.*

29. **Mr. Ocampo** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs fully supported the views expressed by the outgoing and incoming Presidents of the Council. It would do its utmost to work with the new President and Bureau to make a success not only of the spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization and of the efforts to mobilize resources for the Brussels Programme of Action at the high-level segment of the substantive session, but also of the Council's more day-to-day work of post-conflict and humanitarian assistance.

30. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs would also support the efforts of the Council to reflect on its future role and the future role of the regional commissions, as part of the overall reform of the Organization. Consultations with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions with regard to the preparations for the Council's high-level segment had been a first innovative step. As former Executive Secretaries of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, he and the outgoing President of the Council were well aware that there was still more room to develop the regional dimension of the Council's work.

31. **Mr. Al-Bader** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group of 77 and China would work with the new President and Bureau of the Council to help that body to play its part in fulfilling the aims of the Organization.

32. **Mr. Wrafter** (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the new President and Bureau of the Council would have the full support of the European Union in what would certainly be an eventful year ahead.

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (E/2004/1 and E/2004/2)

33. **The President** invited the Council to adopt the provisional agenda (E/2004/2).

34. *The provisional agenda was adopted.*

35. **The President** announced that, by adopting resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/14, the Council had decided to take certain measures designed to revitalize and improve its functioning. The General Assembly, in resolutions 45/264, 48/162, 50/227 and 52/12 B, had also approved measures designed to restructure and revitalize the Council.

36. On the basis of the guidelines set out in those resolutions, the Council would at its organizational session consider the provisional agenda for the session (E/2004/2) and the proposed basic programme of work of the Council for 2004 and 2005 (E/2004/1). In addition, the matters listed in the provisional agenda required the adoption of measures at the organizational session.

37. As indicated in paragraph 2 (1) of Council resolution 1988/77, informal consultations would be held on the proposed basic programme of work and other organizational matters. On the basis of those consultations, the Bureau would submit recommendations to the Council at its next meeting.

38. Turning to the question of seating arrangements for delegations, she proposed that, as in the previous year, lots should be drawn to determine which delegation would occupy the first seat. The delegation of Ukraine had thus been selected and the other delegations would be seated in alphabetical order.

39. **Mr. Seth** (Secretary of the Council) drew attention to two editorial errors in paragraph 6 of the proposed basic programme of work of the Council for 2004 and 2005 (E/2004/1). A corrigendum would be issued to reflect the necessary changes.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.